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ABSTRACT

The "Where Do We Go from Here?" conferences provide information to meet the long-term needs of unemployed workers (career change and retraining) and the short-term needs of coping with the psychological problems of being out-of-work. The conference presentation includes 70 to 100 volunteer professionals, providing optimistic and motivational messages. All speakers volunteer their time; materials are contributed by local area banks; and other private businesses and community agencies make in-kind contributions. The program begins with a general assembly. Miniseminars on career changes and subjects related to retraining follow. Most community colleges in the area and special interest groups have exhibits. Participants choose three afternoon "How Can I" sessions out of a possible 12 to 15. Evaluations at the conclusion use an instrument consistent at each presentation for the purpose of comparison. The large number of registrants is due to innovative program marketing using radio and television personalities. The conferences represent phase one of the project to meet the needs of the unemployed. During phase two intensive two-hour evening seminars have been developed at local community colleges on topics such as resume writing, repackaging oneself, and legal and medical concerns. (YLB)

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"WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?"
A National Model for Meeting the Informational Needs of the Unemployed

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"WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?"

A National Model for Meeting the
Informational Needs of the Unemployed

The alarmingly high unemployment rate in the Detroit area ignited a resolve last summer among the city's business and educational leaders to do something about the problems of the unemployed. The result was "Where Do We Go From Here?" a free one-day conference at Henry Ford Community College in nearby Dearborn. The conference proved so successful that it has become a model for similar conferences at community colleges in Detroit and Michigan, as well as throughout the nation.

It all began back in April 1982 when Henry Ford Community College convened an advisory board of concerned business leaders, community service agency representatives, professional people and educators to evaluate what the community colleges, in conjunction with business and community groups, could do to assist the many thousands of unemployed throughout the Greater Detroit area. The result of this advisory board meeting, along with a $5,000 grant from Dr. Sonya Friedman, talk show psychologist, WDIV-TV and USA Cable, was a model unemployment conference entitled "Where Do We Go From Here?". This one-day conference addressed the various problems of the unemployed, including career change discussions, retraining opportunities, the future of work, plus ways to cope with the psychological pressures of being out-of-work. It was decided by the advisory board that the most crucial

need of the displaced worker was for meaningful and valid information. The providing of valuable information by the Detroit conferences could begin to alter the long term consequences of the unemployed.

The first "Where Do We Go From Here?" conference on June 12, 1982, attracted over 1,100 unemployed workers to the campus of Henry Ford Community College. Its dramatic success set the stage for replicating the program at community colleges throughout the Greater Detroit area. By December 7, 1982 over 10,000 unemployed had attended seven local conferences.

Since then, more than 250 colleges nationwide have requested start-up materials to replicate this conference in their respective service areas. Colleges in Oregon, Pennsylvania, Washington, New York, Illinois, and Wisconsin have successfully implemented this type of program and served thousands of unemployed in their communities.

Locally, what began as a joint venture between Henry Ford Community College and Dr. Sonya Friedman had grown into a cooperative program involving the greater Detroit community colleges, Manufacturer's Bank, WDIV-TV, WXYZ Radio, community agencies, private businesses, numerous program volunteers and many concerned citizens. As this program circulated through all the area community colleges, the out-of-worker received valuable information and tips that began to give them new motivation and direction. And with the advent of the program's becoming a national model with cooperation and support from The White House and the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges, the conference will

service vast numbers of displaced workers through the country.

The "Where Do We Go From Here?" conference series was established to meet both the long term needs of the unemployed, that of career change and retraining, and the short term needs, those of coping with the many psychological problems of being out-of-work. Such coping strategies included getting out of debt, financial planning, stress reduction, marital problems, good nutrition, medical and legal concerns, and effective time management.

These conferences provide information to the unemployed so that the displaced worker can have valid data to make meaningful career and life-change decisions, evaluate what retraining is available, anticipate costs involved in career change, and learn how to deal with the frustrating day-to-day psychological problems that plague the out-of-work. The conference presentation includes 70 to 100 volunteer professionals and is optimistic and motivational.

All of the speakers volunteer their time; materials are contributed by local area banks; and other private businesses and community agencies make in-kind contributions.

Most costs for the conference are absorbed by donations or direct contribution of materials by business and industry. Actual cash outlay is relatively small.

The conference format has remained the same as the presentation moves from campus to campus. The program begins at 9:00 a.m. with a meeting of all participants. The general assembly lasts until 10:30 a.m. and includes a welcome by the sponsoring community

college, a discussion of the U.S. and local economy, a presentation on where the future jobs will be, a motivational message to reinforce the self-esteem of the participant, and a short discussion on the kinds of retraining available through the community college system. Financial aid, counseling, and admissions representatives from the sponsoring college are identified so that participants interested in obtaining additional information about the college can see them after the general session concludes.

From 10:30 a.m. till 12:30 p.m. the participants break into mini-seminars on career changes and subjects related to retraining. In addition, all community colleges in the area plus special interest groups have exhibits and tables set-up for participants to obtain information on topics ranging from dealing with alcoholism, time management, getting into school, career planning, to finding inexpensive recreation in order to relax. A free lunch is provided for the participants during the 12:00-12:30 p.m. time slot along with a half hour of musical entertainment.

At 12:30 p.m. the participants regroup to begin the afternoon "How Can I" sessions. These sessions allow participants to select 3 areas out of a possible 12 to 15 topics. Groups meet for approximately 1 hour on each topic and then move to the next session. Participants choose from topics dealing with stress, establishing good mental attitudes, medical and legal problems, resume writing, repackaging themselves, coping strategies, financial concerns, nutrition, starting their own business, and sessions on women's special problems.

At the conclusion of the day-long event, evaluations are completed by those in attendance and the data tabulated. The evaluation instrument is consistent at each of the campus presentations so that the multiple conferences can be compared and analyzed.

This one-day conference is dedicated solely to the unemployed worker. No political topic or speakers are presented. The only politically-related aspect of the conference is the declaring of "Moving Ahead Day" by the various cities to coincide with and bring attention to the conference presentation as it moves from campus to campus, city to city.

Registration of participants is conveniently done by phone and a pre-conference brochure is mailed to confirm the reservation.

The large number of registrants at every event is due to the innovative marketing of the program. The marketing of this particular conference series has been unique in comparison to traditional marketing practices of community colleges. The joint cooperative effort between a community college and a radio and television station talk show host has enable the program to be mass marketed to the Greater Detroit area on a daily basis. In addition, clientele reached by radio and television personalities differ from the usual clientele reached by college articles, publications, or news releases. Many individuals are more secure about enrolling in this type of conference if they are persuaded by an individual who is not an educator but a person respected by the community as a solid professional in a media career.

The talk show host offers this perspective to the potential registrants. This same approach, utilizing radio and television personalities has been successful in programs replicated outside Michigan.

Video-taped public service announcements and radio spot announcements, because of this cooperative venture, are of no cost to the college. The media station benefits from its community services involvement and publicity and in turn, the community college acquires a marketing arm which reaches an unusually large audiences.

Reaching a large audience with good program materials and marketing is only as good as the feed-back received from the out-of-work participants. Preliminary results of the evaluations from the seven Detroit area conferences revealed that 91% of the participants felt that the program met their expectations, 88% recognized the need for retraining or upgrading of skills, and 99% of the unemployed reported receiving much valuable information during the event.

Other data such as age, sex, length of time unemployed, zip codes and miscellaneous data helped define the parameters of the unemployed.

Finally, no project can be complete without planned follow-up programs. The "Where Do We Go From Here?" conferences represented phase one of the project to meet the needs of the many unemployed. Phase two of the program developed intensive two-hour evening seminars at the local community colleges to cover

such topics as resume writing, repackaging yourself, getting out of debt, and legal and medical concerns of the unemployed. Phase three begins the massive funding needed to provide monies for the unemployed to enable them to begin retraining at a local community college. Monies raised would be given to local community colleges and restricted for use only by the unemployed. One fund-raising idea being formulated is the raising of millions of dollars through a concert series at the Pontiac Silverdome, an enclosed stadium with seating of 100,000. By late 1983 fund-raising events will begin in the Greater Detroit area to meet the financial needs of the unemployed as they seek retraining through the many community colleges in the area.

In addition, The White House and Public Broadcasting System have expressed an interest in promoting "Where Do We Go From Here?" across the nation in 1983.

As more and more unemployed receive current and valid information about the future of work they will be able to position themselves for retraining opportunities, long-term career decisions, and have the psychological tools to cope with a rapidly changing, high technology society.

NOTE: Individuals requesting additional information on planning unemployment conferences can contact Dr. Robert J. Kopecky at Henry Ford Community College, Management Development Division, 5101 Evergreen Road, Dearborn, MI 48128 1-313-271-2854